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EPA to Extend Deadline for 2015 Ozone NAAQS Area Designations

WASHINGTON – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt sent a letter to governors today to inform them of EPA’s efforts related to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for ozone promulgated in October 2015. EPA is extending the deadline for promulgating initial area designations, by one year, for the 2015 ozone NAAQS.

“States have made tremendous progress and significant investment cleaning up the air. We will continue to work with states to ensure they are on a path to compliance,” **said Administrator Scott Pruitt.**

The National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for ground-level ozone is an outdoor air regulation under the Clean Air Act. As part of the process to determine what areas of the country are able to meet the current air quality standards, states are currently submitting their proposals for area designations under the 70 parts per billion (ppb) standard, which was lowered from 75 ppb in 2015. Areas designated as being in “nonattainment” of the standard face consequences, including: increased regulatory burdens, restrictions on infrastructure investment, and increased costs to businesses.

EPA is giving states more time to develop air quality plans and EPA is looking at providing greater flexibility to states as they develop their plans. And, pursuant to the language in the recently-enacted FY2017 Omnibus funding bill, Administrator Pruitt is establishing an Ozone Cooperative Compliance Task Force to develop additional flexibilities for states to comply with the ozone standard.

Additionally, the Agency is taking time to better understand some lingering, complicated issues so that air attainment decisions can be based on the latest and greatest information. This additional time will also provide the agency time to review the 2015 ozone NAAQS, prior to taking this initial implementation step.

Although the new ozone standard was set on October 1, 2015, there remains a host of complex issues that could undermine associated compliance efforts by states and localities. The Agency is evaluating these issues, primarily focused on:

- Fully understanding the role of background ozone levels;
- Appropriately accounting for international transport,
- And, timely consideration of exceptional events demonstrations.

“We share the goal of clean air, a robust economy and stronger, healthier communities. We are committed to working with states and local officials to effectively implement the ozone standard in a manner that is supportive of air quality improvement efforts without interfering with local decisions or impeding economic growth,” **said Administrator Pruitt.**

Since 1980, total emissions of the six principal air pollutants have dropped by 63 percent and ozone levels have declined by 33 percent. Despite the continued improvement of air quality, costs associated with compliance of the ozone NAAQS have significantly increased.

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